



**Global
Forum**
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and Nutrition

The future of Family Farming: empowerment and equal rights for women and youth

Summary of discussion no. 104

From 9 June to 7 July 2014



Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition

About the Document

This document summarizes the results of the online discussion "The future of Family Farming: empowerment and equal rights for women and youth" held on the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (www.fao.org/fsnforum) from 9 June to 7 July 2014

The following summary aims at providing readers with a general overview of the discussion, including the list of all references shared. For the full text of all contributions and further background information please refer to the discussion page:

www.fao.org/fsnforum/forum/discussions/family-farming

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Overview

Participants to the online discussion shared consensus that in both developing and developed countries youth and women face many barriers to entry and success in the agricultural sector.

While youth is a group defined by generational criteria and women are a larger segment cross cutting the whole rural population, they encounter similar obstacles, such as difficulties in gaining the necessary knowledge, problems accessing credit or simply lack of interest in farming activities. However, substantial differences between the reasons keeping women and youth from farming have been highlighted during the discussion.

Female farmers are already significant contributors to agriculture, yet they face widespread discrimination. Despite the considerable amount of labour that rural women in both industrialized and developing countries dedicate to agricultural activities they are often denied participation in decisions made about farming and finances. Women farmers in many countries still need to access the same rights as men in order to be considered head of the holding or to be legally accepted as owner of land and enterprises.

Participants argued that support for women farmers should be tackled in the context of the need for greater gender equality, the main issue being their empowerment to acquire capacities and rights to act as family farming leaders and entrepreneurs.

Youth on the other hand needs mainly to be incentivised to take up farming activities and is in need of positive discrimination, particularly in terms of public support and willingness to get involved in farming activities.

Obstacles keeping youth and women from becoming successful farmers

Participants argued that in both rich and poor countries agriculture is often seen as an activity of the past, linked to poverty and backwardness. People working in agriculture suffer from a negative image among the public and most especially the youth. Farming activities are portrayed as being for the less educated. Agriculture can be perceived as being a form of manual punishment as in many countries agriculture related activities are used by schools and prisons to punish undisciplined individuals. This view is also shared in richer countries where the income of farmers is often substantially lower than that for comparable jobs in other sectors. This perception conflicts with the widespread wish of the young population to modernize and start a successful city life. Young people might not be willing to wait for marginal returns on hard farming labor and often accept low paying jobs in cities instead of staying on farms.

The negative image of agriculture can be so widespread that parents and family do not see agriculture as an activity that allows their children to have a better life, leading them to encourage their offspring to seek employment in cities.

As a result of men increasingly leaving agriculture to settle in the cities, women get the opportunity to take over, which leads to a feminization of the workforce in agriculture. While such feminization per se is not undesirable, women workers in agriculture are often disempowered and low skilled. They do not own the land, and in many cases they represent the residual labour force.

In addition to these issues that can keep women and youth from successfully engaging in agriculture altogether, participants shared a series of problems and obstacles that prevent those who are already active as farmers from reaching their full potential and being successful.

The lack of access to arable land, credit and the exclusion from family decision making are problems faced by women and young people who aim to successfully take up a farming activity. Discrimination against youth and women when applying for both formal and informal loans, often due to their difficulty to provide collateral, can discourage these groups from wanting to be involved in agriculture.

The lack of education and extension services, inability to access to technology, and lack of access to inputs such as seeds and fertilizer also emerged during the discussion as strong barriers to successful and sustainable farming carried out by youth and women.

Furthermore, the productivity of female farmers is also negatively affected by their limited labour availability and the competing requirements for their labour between household responsibilities, farm work and community responsibilities. These challenges can keep female farmers from moving up the value chain. In fact, women are mostly involved in farm work and their participation in marketing, agro-processing and other value-adding opportunities is limited. This problem is exacerbated by them not being integrated into the decision-making processes of their families, clans, villages and the society at large.

In Cote d'Ivoire, for instance, where young people are starting to assert and enjoy themselves economically through the revenues from the agricultural exploitation of the lowlands, women tend to be employed as labourers for these young men. While this activity makes them earn money, they remain vulnerable and dependent on these young male farmers.

What can be done?

Participants agreed that while there is no "one-size-fits-all solution" to incorporate these demographics into agriculture, much can be done.

Building a positive image of agriculture

The underlying negative perception of agriculture needs to be contrasted effectively by offering more agricultural programs to encourage youth to participate in farming.

Educating potential farmers and the society as a whole on the value of agriculture and conveying the message that farming is an economically sustainable profession is fundamental for increasing participation. Commentators emphasized that strengthening agricultural extension training is vital to ensure productivity and financial success of women and youth engaged in farming. In the words of one participant "[...] for young farmers [...] it is essential that the attractiveness of the agricultural sector is promoted to them and that vocational education and training in agriculture is widely available, accessible, attractive and affordable".

Participants stressed that information and training given to potential young farmers should relate to small-scale agriculture and should support the continuation of family run farming instead of focusing only on knowledge that benefits large scale or intensive farming. It could incorporate teachings on traditional knowledge and domestic skills to create value added products to sell. Strengthening the role of farmers in ecological conservation, preserving biodiversity, and sharing intergenerational farming knowledge is important and such information needs to be made available both at school as well as through extension services.



Supporting young farmers in the European Union

As the European representative organisation for young farmers from across the Union, the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) works exclusively on programs and initiatives that help to strengthen the role of youth in agriculture and the opportunities for young people to engage with the farming sector. This includes frequent meetings with policymakers and other stakeholders on the subject of youth in agriculture, as well as presentations and conferences on the subject, and internal discussions on how to find better solutions for the challenges ahead – both on the ground and in the Brussels policy arena.

In the context of trying to attract more women to careers in agriculture and rural areas, CEJA is currently taking part in the MWE: Mentoring Women for Entrepreneurship Project. This initiative aims to create new training courses and social networks for women in rural areas to foster and inspire the entrepreneurial spirit of young women in rural communities in order to improve their social and professional status and gain equal gender rights across Europe.

Giving access to credit to female and young farmers

Throughout the discussion contributors mentioned that youth and women are likely to encounter, substantial problem in accessing the credit needed to invest in their agricultural activities. Credit is often tied to availability of collateral, usually land, which young people

do not own. The same problem can be encountered by women, who are at times not entitled to owning land and find themselves unable to access credit at all. Participants therefore highlighted the importance of designing and making available appropriate financial packages to cater to the needs of these groups.

Investments in infrastructure and technology

Participants also commented on the responsibility of governments to bring infrastructure and technology to rural areas in order to help discourage excessive urban migration. By linking farmers to the markets, agriculture can become a more attractive and profitable activity that goes beyond subsistence farming.

In order to attract investment, the policy landscape needs to be stable as investments need time for amortization. Contributors suggested carrying out policy work that helps countries in designing longer term policies that create an environment favorable for investments.

Such investments need to take the interests of the farmers and more specifically of the more vulnerable groups, such as women and youth, into account and be beneficial to them. Investment also needs to be clearly targeted toward family farming, given its importance that these family-based activities have for food security, social and environmental stability and for the livelihoods of rural population. Farmer control of production resources, land and water needs to be guaranteed (especially in respect to the weak legal status of women living in rural areas), while at the same time building strong markets to market the farm produces.

During the discussion ICTs were also identified as being important to help farming become more modern and appeal to the younger population. Using information technology for gathering price information, accessing farming techniques and not least reduce the remoteness of the farming communities from the big urban centers was identified as an important element for making agriculture a more attractive and promising livelihood choice.

Higher value of food produce

Giving the substantial economic pull that cities can exercise on rural population, participants argued that is of great importance for all proposed measures to result in more value of the food being retained at the farm and within the farmers' families. Agroecology and the increasing awareness of healthy eating habits were identified as a big change for producers as high value produce could gain a substantial market share. To foster this, more projects should be developed that aim to bring together young consumers with young producers.

In the same way it is important to promote women's economic empowerment by encouraging their participation in profitable economic activities. Participants suggested to achieve this by increasing the processing activities of farm produce, promoting food preparation, canning, crafts or other activities. Besides increasing household incomes, a stronger involvement of women in the food chain could foster the standing of women as promoter of local food security and help them increase their weight in decision making.

However, in order to include women and young farmers better into the entire food production chain, research aimed at developing new value-added products derived from family farming needs to be carried out. Such activities need then to be consequently supported by policies and strategies that open and maintain local, regional and national marketing channels.

Women's organisations

Many participants argued that women active in agriculture can strengthen their position vis-à-vis society, authorities and financial institutions by organizing themselves in cooperatives or other kinds of collaborative organizations. Participants shared examples of women heading large agricultural organizations, which give women in farming a more prominent face. Other organizations, such as the Ladies in Agriculture Club in the United Kingdom, help female farmers connect to one another while in Jamaica, the Network of Rural Women Producers is hosting weekly dinners where female farmers can cook and confer together.



The National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM)

In Malawi, the National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM) assists smallholder farmers in general, and female farmers in particular, to join or form Farmer Associations so that they can benefit from economies of scale in accessing the inputs and services that they require. Through the associations, members are able to acquire cheaper inputs and consolidate their produce so that they can increase their bargaining power with buyers. In addition, buyers are willing to bring their markets closer to the farmers because they are assured of accessing the commodities that they need in bulk. Although this benefits all farmers, it is female farmers who benefit more because unlike male farmers, they have fewer options and opportunities for selling their produce because of the time and labour constraints discussed above.

Need for an inclusive approach

Through the discussion, participants felt the need to emphasize that in order to make any noticeable difference for women and youth in their role in agriculture, the conversation must involve those who are to benefit from the interventions and policies. Without making these processes inclusive very little can be achieved. At the same time the issues should not only be discussed among the interested groups but the entire society needs to be involved, including, most importantly, those in power.



Supporting young agro-entrepreneurs Malaysia

The young Agropreneur programme managed by the Ministry of Agriculture & Agro-Based Industry is specifically designed for young people aged under 40 years. The approach of this program is to assist and encourage the participation of young people in entrepreneurship based on agricultural activities. It targets all activities in the value chain of agriculture such as crops, livestock, fisheries, marketing, technology and innovation as well as special projects such as agrotourism and agro-based industries.



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Supporting women farmers in Japan

JA-Group, an association of 700 agricultural cooperatives in Japan owns 2,000 farmer's markets to provide female farmers with opportunities to make agricultural incomes by selling their agricultural and handmade products. In addition, there are 16,800 farmer's markets in Japan including those owned by local governments, selling 8.6 billion USD worth of products in 2010, which constitutes direct incomes for farmers, after the deduction of a 15% sales charge.

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